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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study reported was to determine the best ways to manage interest centers in the elementary classroom. The study considered six techniques of assigning students to interest centers--teacher assignment, in which children were asked by their teacher to work at the center on a certain day; daily sign-up, in which children were allowed to choose at the beginning of the day whether they would like to visit the center; weekly sign-up, in which students picked the day they would like to visit the center; partner sign-up, in which the weekly sign-up format was followed with the additional consideration that students signed up with a friend; non-sign-up center, in which children were given six days in which to visit the center but no sign-ups were held; and the small-group center, in which three or four students were assigned to the center to complete a task as a group. The group studied was made up of 17 students, nine in grade 4 and eight in grade 3. The most popular assignment methods were partner sign-up and group center. (Author/IRT)

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Management Techniques

for

Elementary Level Interest Centers

by

Jane E. Roecks

Paper in partial requirement for

Masters of Science Degree in

Curriculum and Instruction

University of Wisconsin-Madison

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Background

During the past few years interest centers have been tried in my classroom. Unfortunately they were not widely used. This apparent lack of use has caused me to ponder "just why". Since I feel that learning centers are a valuable addition to the classroom, I then decided to experiment using different means by which learning centers could be used more efficiently in the classroom. The questions that I asked myself formed the framework for this paper. The questions are as follows:

1. How can interest centers be used as a viable alternative for learning?
2. What is the most productive and efficient way to integrate learning centers into the instructional setting?
3. In what ways do children enjoy using learning centers?

Viable Learning Alternative

Learning centers provide for alternative ways of teaching. Many of the things taught in schools today are too far removed from real life situations. After teaching three years, it seemed to me there is too much "book learning" taking place in schools.

Interest centers can be set up so that children learn to make decisions and solve problems. First children and teachers must determine what they want to do. Second, they must decide how they will do it. They must then consider alternate ways of reaching the goal. Thirdly, they must find a way to attack the problem. Fourth,

if it does not work what else can they try? Fifth, self evaluation must be done. This information is used to improve the learning centers by the process of self-feedback.

Learning centers can also encourage children to make choices in developing their curriculum. The teacher structures the framework of what is to be taught. The children proceed, in different ways, to end up at the same place. In other words the teacher is showing the class that their ideas count; she is at the same time telling the children that she trusts them.

Another choice the children have involves determining the type of media they prefer. Elementary-aged children need more time to explore their environment through building, creating, painting, drawing, touching, smelling, and imagining. Interest centers provide time in the busy school day for children to carry out these explorations.

Since the children are encouraged to make choices, they will perhaps feel more pride in their completed products. As a teacher, this writer is concerned about the lack of pride children have in their work. So much work ends up in the garbage can. It is hoped that the interest the centers developed for this study caused children to take more pride in their work.

Classroom Integration

In past years, children in my classroom were not adequately prepared to use learning centers. It was also difficult for me to keep track of who had been to the center and how the center had been used.

There are so many spare moments during the school day. Interest centers are a possible way of productively using this spare time. Instead of just sitting, children can finish up, continue, or start new projects at the centers. Children can become more self-directed. As a reward for finishing work, they may work at the interest centers. They won't need to ask the teacher, "What can I do now?"

In this study, interet centers were introduced into the classroom gradually. Classroom management was facilitated by a daily diary of interest center use.

Affective Outcomes

Since children are the major users of interest centers, their feelings about the use of interest centers are critical. It is essential to find out which centers they prefer, and why they prefer them.

Still another reason for considering childrens' ideas is that they perceive the world differently than adults do. They can make suggestions that are valuable in planning future centers. This valuable feedback from children make interest centers a useful addition to the classroom.

In line with this thought, the affective outcomes of students were considered in the design of this study. This was accomplished by designing and testing appropriate interview techniques.

Before undertaking this study, a review of literature was undertaken. The results of this review guided the final formulation of the design of this study. The review of literature is given in the next section.

Review of Literature

Kaplan, et al (1973) has stated that "Individualized Learning is the process of developing and retaining individuality by a classroom organization that provides for the effective and efficient learning experiences of each class member" p. xiii. The needs of individual children are being considered more in todays' classrooms. Among the many books printed on individualized instruction two are especially useful. They were written by Johnson (1970) and Bechtol (1973). An example is given by Frymier and Galloway (1970) of a traditional classroom where individual needs are not considered.

> Johnny went directly to his homeroom, took his seat, and put his books away in his desk. After the ritual of opening school exercises, he turned to page seventy-six in his mathematics book. The assignment was written neatly on the boards and he knew exactly what to do. If he worked hard and fast enough, he might finish and be able to begin his math homework (set 40), which he knew would be mentioned at the end of the period. He understood well this use of time before the beginning of the next lesson in reading (p. 3).

One way to meet the needs of individual children is to introduce interest centers into the classroom environment. Learning centers can serve many functions in today's classrooms. The purposes of such learning centers are given by Kaplan et al (1973).

> Learning centers become the vehicles for moving students away from teacher dominated learning experiences and toward student-selected learning activities. Learning centers organize and direct learning experiences for students by allowing freedom while providing structure. (p. xiv).

Learning centers are concept oriented. One form of learning center is the interest center, which is the topic of this paper. As Bechtol (1973) pointed out, interest centers differ from learning

centers in one primary way:

> Unlike a learning station, the interest center does not have a specified set of objectives or a management system. It does have a purpose--to build, to test, to read, to view, to listen, to explore (p. 83).

Learning centers are then established to teach specific educational concepts, whereas interest centers develop broad interests of individual students.

A number of articles have been written on making the transition from a non interest center room to an interest center oriented room. Individual articles by educators who have introduced learning centers into their classrooms are presented by Rapport (1970). This review may be useful to beginners in developing interest centers. A step-by-step transition is given by Kaplan et al (1973) on how to introduce interest centers into the classroom.

After a teacher decides to use interest centers s(he) may have a number of questions. Questions most commonly asked by teachers who are considering starting interest centers are presented by Voight (1971). Rapport (1970) gives a number of suggestions on how to organize centers as does Reasoner (1976).

Ideas are shared by Kaplan (1973) on how to introduce interest centers into the classroom. There are also a number of books that give photographs of interest centers that have successfully been tried in classrooms. Excellent resources for planning interest centers are given by Dean (1974), Voight (1971), Williams (1969), Reasoner (1976), Kapflor and Kapfler (1973), Forte (1974), Frank, (1974), Fox (1976),

and Nations (1976).

When interest centers are carried out in the classroom teachers must reconsider the roles they play in the room. Williams (1969), stresses the role of experimentation and sharing of results with fellow teachers. The changing role of the teacher is discussed in Kaplan et al (1973). All does not always proceed smoothly in interest center oriented classroom. Some suggestions for solving classroom problems created by interest centers are mentioned in Kaplan (1970).

The use of time must also be considered in classroom using interest centers. Kaplan et al (1973) discusses how the teacher structures classroom time. Other management suggestions may be found in Reasoner (1976). Both of the above sources mention the management of childrens' time as well as the management of teachers' time.

A limited amount of research has been done on how children were assigned to interest centers. Only one source, Smith and Kapfer (1972) considered group assignment. Their management groups were by interest, academic ability, workstyles, social patterns, choice of day, learning styles, and teachers' choice of groups.

It is the purpose of this paper to consider different ways of managing childrens' assignments to interest centers. This is accomplished by using six different management techniques.

Methodology

The sample used for this study consisted of the third and fourth grade students in the writers' homeroom. There were seventeen students in the class, nine fourth graders and eight third graders. This study

was conducted during the Reading hour. Reading hour was from 8:30 A.M. to 9:30 A.M. five days per week. The study was conducted from October, 1976 through March, 1977.

As previously stated, the purpose of this study is to determine the best way to manage interest centers. For this study, an interest center is defined as consisting of an interest station--which is a curriculum developed by this writer. Management of the interest center is accomplished by one of six management techniques. The effectiveness of the management techniques is the primary focus of this study.

Each management technique was paired with an interest center. Pairing was done at random. For each of the six management techniques a pilot and test run were made. This meant that a total of 12 interest centers were developed. Each child completed every interest center.

The findings of the pilot run were used to improve the collection of data, and to "iron out" unforseen difficulties. The six stations used in this pilot effort are given in the Appendix.

The remainder of this methodology section discusses the six management techniques and the corresponding six interest stations paired with each technique.

Management Techniques

As an introduction to management techniques each member of the class was asked to follow the same sign-up procedure for the interest center. Children could sign up at anytime during the hour long Reading period. After they completed this task, they wrote their name on the

board in a designated area. At the end of class the board was checked to make sure it included all childrens' names.

In the first technique , referred to as the "teacher assigned," children were asked by their teacher to work at the center on a certain day. This was accomplished by the teacher selecting three children to go to the interest center on each day. This procedure was continued until all children had participated. Directions at the center explained what each person should do. In each of the six management techniques described in this paper, children were allowed to carry their project through to completion. The amount of time involved ranged from one period to two periods.

In the second technique called, "daily sign-up" children were allowed to chose at the beginning of the day whether or not they would like to visit the center on that day. One day before the center was to begin it was announced:

> Tomorrow there will be a sign up sheet posted on the board. If you would like to work at the interest center sign your name on that list. I am sorry but only three people may visit a center each day. If the list is full you will have to wait until another day.

The following day the list was posted. The teacher was stationed near the sign up sheet to confusion. This cycle was repeated six times.

Before starting the third technique called, "weekly sign up" a class meeting was held. At the meeting the following was announced:

> Tomorrow when you come to Reading there will be a sheet on the board. This sheet will have everyday of the week listed. Pick the day of the week you would like to visit the interest center. Put your name under that day. There is a limit of three people

at a station each day.. If you are sick, nobody may replace you for that day. When you come back you may pick another day to visit the center.

A sign up procedure similar to the one used by the previous technique was used in the fourth management technique. It was called "partner sign up". The partner technique, has each person sign up with a friend. Two sets of partners could use the center at one time. As there were an odd number of children, one child repeated the center as a friend to the remaining child.

The fifth technique was called the "no sign up center". The day before the center was to begin children were told that sometime during the next six days they would be required to visit the interest center. There was no need for children to sign up. A three person limit was again imposed, resulting in those arriving at the center using it first.

For the sixth and final technique called, "the small group center", three or four children were assigned to the center. They were assigned a task and were required to carry it out as a group. In order to complete the task they had to cooperate with each other.

Interest Stations

Each of the six management techniques was paired with an interest station. This pairing was done at random. The result of this pairing was six different interest centers. These interest centers were completed by each of seventeen students. Listed below is each learning station and the corresponding management techniques.

Interest Centers Used in Test Run

Station 7-Seed Station (Teacher Assigned)

Objectives:

1. New media of dried beans and peas, and corn.
2. This exercise required preplanning of colors and design.
3. Fine motor practice.

Format:

1. Children were told they could use pictures from the table or draw pictures of their own.
2. Children mounted their pictures on cardboard.
3. Glue beans, peas, and tapioca seeds on the cardboard to form a picture.

Station 8-Mobiles (Daily Sign-up)

Objectives:

1. Experiment with balance.
2. Use different textures, materials, and shapes to create an art form, or mobile.

Format:

1. Materials were put out on the table: markers, fabric, photographs, construction paper, and string.
2. Suggestions were:
   a. Make a mobile with drawings of your favorite season.
   b. Mount any picture you like on paper to form a mobile.
   c. Make a mobile with different shaped pieces of paper.
   d. Make a mobile about your favorite thing: animals, food, etc.

Station 9-Walt Disney (Weekly Sign-up)

Objectives:

1. Make the children feel they were really at Disney Land.
2. Explore a new A.V. material-viewmaster with reels.
3. Building with dioramas.
4. Appreciation of the characters from the Disney books.

Format:

1. Post cards, Disney books, and viewmaster were displayed.
2. Children could use the viewmaster reels to see what Disney Land really looked like.
3. They could make a diorama from their favorite Disney book or movie.
4. Cartoon drawing (or puppets) of Disney characters could be made.
5. Read a Disney book.

Station 10-Puppets (Partner Sign-up)

Objectives:

1. Creatively make their own puppets.
2. Play with puppets already in our room.
3. Make up their own plays to go with puppets.
4. Experiment with various media, mainly fabric, paper bags, and popsicle sticks.
5. Different modes of instruction-filmstrips with directions on making puppets.

Format:

1. Children were encouraged to make puppets.
2. Sample puppets (finger, stick, bag, and paper plate) were displayed for motivation.
3. Filmstrips could be viewed for ideas.
4. Books were displayed on puppet making.
5. Puppets were shared with the rest of the class
6. Those who did not want to make puppets could act out a play with puppets already at hand.

Station 11-Senses (Free Center)

Objectives:

1. A chance to use senses not always well developed in school.
   a. Smell
   b. Taste
   c. Feeling
2. An awareness of senses used everyday in school.
   a. Sight
   b. Hearing

Format:

1. Dittoes provided basic directions.
2. Smell-six mystery bottles were displayed-from these bottles the substances had to be identified.
3. Taste-Feeling-Smell-Pop corn, how does it feel after it has been popped? What smell do you notice when the corn is popping? How does it taste?
4. Feeling-15 objects were placed in a bag. Children had to identify what they were feeling.
5. Hearing-Station yourself in different parts of the school. What do you hear?

Station 12-Puzzles (Group Center)

Objectives:

1. Work together cooperatively with your group.
2. Manipulate puzzle parts.
3. Assemble the puzzle.
4. A chance to work in a small group setting with three other people.
5. A chance to work with class members they did not know.

Format:

1. Puzzles were displayed on a table.
2. There were:
   a. Simple puzzles
   b. Medium puzzles
   c. 500 piece puzzle.
3. The group chose the puzzle they wanted to work on.

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to determine the best ways to manage interest centers. This study considered six techniques of assigning children to interest centers. Each technique was randomly paired with an interest station, resulting in six interactions. The "teacher assigned" center was the first technique used. The second method of assignment was a "daily sign up" sheet put on the chalkboard. The first four people to sign up could visit the center on that day. In the third center children were given a choice of which day in the next week they preferred to visit the center. This was called the "weekly sign up". The fourth type of assignment was "partner sign up". Children chose a partner and were then assigned, by the teacher, a day to use the center. In the fifth type of assignment the first four children to sit down at the center could use it for the day, without signing up. This was the "free center". The sixth station was a "group assigned" by the teacher to work cooperatively to achieve

one end product. Assignment to the center was determined by the teacher.

Each child in the class went through these six assignment centers twice; all seventeen children in the class participated in all twelve interest centers. The first six interest centers were used as a pilot run for both the children and the teacher. This was needed to help familiarize the children with the six different methods. Since the data for these first six assignment stations were used for training purpose the results for these stations are not included. The results for the remaining six stations however form the basis for this study.

A tally record sheet was kept for each child in the class. When the child finished a day at the center s(he) was asked which method of assignment was their favorite. Records were kept for childrens' preference at all six centers.

The results from the tabulation of these records are given in the results section.

Strengths and Weaknesses

This study has both its strengths and weaknesses. Some of these are discussed in the following pages.

Strengths

Interest centers fill an educational need. They match the interest of the child to what s(he) is doing. As the child chooses what s(he) wants to do s(he) gets used to making decisions without the teacher's direction. This makes the meeting of individual needs possible.

Black Earth Elementary children come to school with a broad spectrum of experiences. Centers can be established so that no one is favored because of social class, or ability. There is not a right or wrong answer. There is just an end product.

An end product of the interest centers could be to reduce competition in the classroom. None of the children's projects were graded. Children were encouraged to evaluate their own work. They were asked if they liked their end product. If they did fine. If they didn't they could comment on how they would make things better. At all times the emphasis was placed on personal growth. This writer tried not to comment on whether she thought the work was good or bad. Creativity was then encouraged. Childrens' work was not compared, hopefully reducing competition among peers.

Due to the limited amount of physical space in the room, the interest stations were thought to increase the level of interpersonal relationships. Children were able to communicate with each other while they worked. Since they were assigned to stations in different ways, an opportunity was provided for them to interact with children with whom they had never before worked. In some individualized classroom children are isolated from this type of small group interaction.

Black Earth prides itself in being an I.G.E. school. Class size is small and there is a full time aid to assist four teachers in each unit. This factor contributed to teachers having more time for working with students. These factors should raise the quality of education. They were particularly important to this teacher since more time to

create centers and to make more accurate observations was available.

Direct teacher observation was a strength. The teacher was "right on the spot." Immediate feedback was provided to the teacher. Corrections in management and environment were made before major problems developed. A better feel for how children reacted to centers was obtained. The fact that this communication was direct prevented communication distortion, giving the teacher reliable information.

Weaknesses

Besides the strengths of the study listed above, there were also a number of limitations. Being the teacher as well as the observer influenced my perceptions of what is taking place in the classroom. My evaluation was purely subjective. When the children were interviewed, they perhaps altered their feelings to say what they thought the teacher wanted to hear.

There was another hidden danger regarding children's preference for being assigned to the interest centers. Students might not have been able to separate how they were assigned to the center and how they liked doing the activities that the center had to offer. They might have reported they liked being assigned by the teacher, for example, when they really preferred the activity that was carried out at the center.

The results of this study applied only to this classroom. Few classes have this small a membership. Thus, generalizations stated in the summary apply only to this classroom at Black Earth school. Further study needs to be done to research possible differences in the suitability

of using interest centers with larger classrooms.

Results

Three types of information were gathered from this study. The first type of information presents the recorded preference of students with respect to the six management techniques. A summary of this information is given in Table 1. The second type of information further analyzes the information presented in Table 1. Data is presented according to each of the six interest stations (Table 2), by grade, (Table 3) and by sex (Table 4).

The third type of information involves this writers' perceptions of the children as they went through the centers. Four types of perceptions were identified. These perceptions involved the childrens' initial enthusiasm, their use of classroom time, their apparent increase in creativity, and their strengthening of interpersonal relationships.

The following pages describe these results in more detail.

Management Techniques

Table 1 represents the composite results for all 17 students according to how they are assigned to the center. As seen from the results nearly half (49%) preferred the "partner sign up". About a quarter of the students (23%) liked the group center.

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES FAVORING EACH OF SIX ASSIGNMENT METHODS

	n	Teacher assigned	Daily Sign Up	Weekly Sign up	Partner Sign Up	Free Center	Group Center
Boys	9	4%	19%	9%	37%	3%	29%
Girls	8	6	10	4	63	2	14
3rd grade	8	4	8	12	38	2	35
4th grade	4	6	20	2	59	2	11
Composite	17	5%	15%	7%	49%	2%	23%

Differences between grade and sex were also apparent. Fifty-nine percent of the fourth graders, but only 38 percent of the third graders preferred "partner sign up". Thirty-five percent of the third graders in contrast to 11% of the fourth graders preferred the group center. Examining sex differences revealed 63% of the girls and only 37% of the boys preferred partner sign up. Twenty-nine percent of the boys preferred the group center whereas only 14% of the girls preferred this way.

In summary over seven out of ten students preferred either partner or group center sign up. Differences in preference existed between sexes and grades however.

Further Analyses

Table 2 shows the percentage responses for all children in the class. Students preferred the "partner sign up" in four out of six interest centers. The individual station with the largest percent of preference for "partner sign up" was the Sense Center (71%) and Puzzle Center (65%). Mobiles Center (41%) and Seeds Center (35%) recorded the highest observed percentage in the "group sign up" category.

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE RESPONSE FOR ALL STUDENTS

n = 17

Name of Center	Teacher Assigned	Daily Sign Up	Weekly Sign Up	Partner Sign Up	Free Center	Group Center
Seeds	24%	6%	6%	29%	0%	35%
Mobiles		35		18	6	41
Walt Disney		18	24	53		6
Puppets		6	6	59		29
Senses		18	6	71	6	
Puzzle	6	6		65		24

Table 3 presents a breakdown by grades. On the whole third graders preferred small group assignment while fourth graders preferred partner sign up. Table 4 shows responses by sex. The results strongly indicates that girls prefer "partner sign up" while boys prefer "small group assignment".

In summary fourth graders (Table 3) and girls (Table 4) preferred "partner sign up" while third graders (Table 3) and boys (Table 4) preferred "small group sign up". As stated before the "partner sign up" was the most preferred method (Table 1). Within this category the Sense Center and Puzzle Center were the most popular.

Perceptions of Student Behavior

As children progressed through the centers they experienced attitude changes. This writer observed a positive attitude change on the part of her children during the time this study was being conducted. Childrens' attitudes seemed to change in four major areas. The children were anxious to try the center, they made constructive use of time, participated in creative activity instead of copying, and they built new relationships. A discussion of these four attitude changes follows.

The children were extremely excited when interest centers were introduced into the room. They were anxious for "their turn". Everyday at least one person would ask if it was their day to go to the center. Some even looked in this writers' lesson plan book to see if it was "their day". When a center came to a close (or even before this) children asked what the next center was going to be.

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE RESPONSE BY GRADE
(Grade 3, n = 8; Grade 4, n = 9)

	Management											
Name of Center	Teacher Assigned		Daily Sign up		Weekly Sign Up		Partner Sign Up		Free Center		Group Center	
Seeds	25%	22%			13%	11%	13%	44%			50%	22%
Mobiles			13	56			13%	22%		11	75%	11
Walt Disney			13	22	38		38	67%			13	
Puppets				11	13		50	67%			38	11
Senses			25	11	13		50	89	13			
Puzzle Center		11		11			63	67			38	11

TABLE 4

PERCENTAGE RESPONSE BY SEX ($\frac{\text{Female}}{\text{Male}}$)

(Female, n = 8 Male, n = 9)

Name of Center	Teacher Assigned		Daily Sign Up		Weekly Sign Up		Partner Sign Up		Free Center		Group Center	
Seeds	38%	11%		11%		11%	25%	33%			38%	33%
Mobiles			50				13	22%		11	38	44
Walt Disney				33	25	22	75	33				11
Puppets			13			11	75	44			13	44
Senses				33		11	88	56	13			
Puzzle Center		11					100	33				44

Time spent at the center was productive. Children seemed to set goals for themselves. If they needed extra time to finish projects they stayed in for recess or asked for more time during the day. One of the most surprising outcomes was how well children used the center when they had a few spare minutes during the day, milk break, before lunch, etc. In summary time spent at the center was constructive.

It was interesting to watch childrens' working styles. At first the children at the center watched what other children at the center were doing. If someone had a good idea others in the group copied it. People not working at the center observed children who were working at the center. Then when they visited the center they duplicated the ideas of previous students. As students progressed through all centers they tended to think more independently. They didn't seem as concerned with what others were doing. Creativity improved. Along with the creativity children developed pride in their work. Instead of throwing their projects into the wastebasket, they took them home to share with their parents.

Another change in attitude could be noticed in relationships between class members. The different ways of assigning children

to the centers were positive learning experiences. Children were matched with people they had never had a chance to work with. As a result many students got to work with others they did not know well.

Successes and Failures

Listed below are some of the successes and failures of the six types of assignment centers, as seen by this writer. These, in large part, reflect a summary of this study.

Teacher Assigned. The "teacher assigned center" had two major advantages and one disadvantage. Groups could be arranged so that children who did not know each other had a chance to work together. Positive role models could also be introduced into the group. Therefore the flexibility of teacher selection would be the first advantage of the "teacher assigned center". A second advantage of the "teacher assigned center" is that children can be sent to the center when they have completed a unit of work. This method does not interrupt the childrens' daily work. They could finish one project or assignment before starting at the center. The disadvantage of this method is that it gives children no freedom of choice. They could not select people they wanted to work with or even pick the day they wanted to visit the center. This method therefore has its drawbacks, also.

Daily Sign Up. The "daily sign up" method had two benefits. Children were allowed to choose the day they wanted to work at the center and this would be the primary benefit. With this type of center, allowance is made for childrens' feelings. On certain days children may prefer working on daily work, while on other days they may be in a mood to work at centers. A second benefit would be that children may sign up with people they want to work with. Again, children are given a opportunity to make a choice.

The daily "sign up" had several drawbacks. First the "daily sign up" took place on the board. Everyday there was a mad rush to the board to sign up for using the center that day. This could have been a safety factor. "Daily sign up" may have benefited more aggressive students, as they were the ones that could push to the board first. A second drawback was that the teacher had no control over who visited the center at the same time. When it happened that four students with poor working habits visited the center at the same time, they raised quite a bit of commotion. They did not use their time wisely and distracted other members of the class.

Weekly Sign Up. Regarding the "weekly sign up" there were quite a few difficulties. Absenteeism was probably the biggest difficulty. If a child was absent a make up time had to be scheduled, this disappointed the rest of the children that had signed up for the day. We have tutors from the High School, and parent volunteers that work with all children. These irregularities in weekly schedules tended to confuse "weekly sign up". The only major advantage of

"weekly sign up" was that children were given a choice of the day they wanted to visit the center.

Partner Sign Up. The "partner sign up" was the writers' favorite method of assignment as well as the childrens'. The children picked a partner and the teacher could decide on the day the pair would go to the center and what other set of partners they would go with. The only disadvantage of this method was that there were an odd number of children in the class. To allow for this one group was allowed to sign up as a "trio".

Free Station. The "free center" was the writers' least favorite type of assignment method. As in the "daily sign up" there was a rush to the center. It was difficult to determine who got there first. A class meeting had to be held to set group rules on who could use the center. Again, the writer had little input on who was to use the center. These were the major disadvantages of the center. It was difficult to determine any benefits of this type of assignment.

Group Center. The "group center" was the writers' second favorite way of assignment. This interest center was designed to allow children to work cooperatively with each other. It was interesting to watch the childrens' interactions. Children in the class got to know each other better. This center did encourage new relationships and develop mutual respect. These are the advantages of the group center. The only disadvantage would be that children were not given a chance to determine who they wanted to work with.

Implications for Change

After conducting this study, there are a number of changes that should be considered in future years. Changes are recommended in the following areas: classroom environment, types of interest centers, evaluations of centers by children and time allocation.

The environment. The interest center environment needs to be separate from the classroom. This division can be accomplished by a portable divider. This divider would help eliminate some of the noise generated by people working at the center. Quite a bit of talking, laughing, and sharing takes place within the center milieu. It seems unfair to children working at the center that the teacher should have to scold them for making too much noise. A portable screen would separate interest center workers from the rest of the class. Another desirable alternative would be to place interest center workers into a separate room or conference room.

Another environmental improvement to be considered involves the amount of space children need to work. Bigger tables where kids can "spread out" are definitely desirable. Too many times this year children were confined by their work space. A storage area to house incompleted projects should also be considered.

Types of Centers. After the environment has been modified, a curriculum using interest and learning centers could be tailored to meet students needs. An interest inventory would be an invaluable tool in determining proper centers for the class. Since children are the major users, why not center instruction around their personal interests?

Centers should be structured to accommodate different types of media. It is essential that children be given ample to time to experiment with a variety of media. Quite a bit of the school day is spent reading. Children need time to explore their worlds in a variety of ways.

The initial attempt of this study was to experiment with different method of center management. Objectives for the centers were extremely general. In future years, it would be useful to establish learning centers teaching specific subject skills. It would also be interesting to run two interest centers in the classroom at the same time. The centers would not need to be related to each other in content.

Evaluations of centers by children. In designing future evaluations of interest centers, this writer would allow for more student involvement in initial planning sessions. After children had visited the center, it would be useful to see what they thought of the content material of the center. Class meetings and brainstorming sessions would be productive for future center development. Utilizing these suggestions, centers could be modified to make them more useful to the ultimate users--the students themselves.

Time Allocations. When talking about time two elements must be considered. The first is the amount of time children are allowed to spend at the centers. Most of the children in the group were encouraged to finish their centers within the Reading block which is only an hour long. In future centers, students should be

encouraged to take the amount of time they needed to complete the project (This is difficult in an I.G.E. school where children have to fold up and go on to another class at a specific time.).

It would be useful to carry out the original experiment over a longer period of time. Twelve interest centers were created and used during the course of this study. It was difficult to plan and carry out the centers in this limited amount of time. Replication of this type of center assignment method would make this study more useful if it were carried out three or four times during the school year.

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APPENDIX

Interest Stations Used in Pilot Run

Lead in Center

Objectives:

1. Get the children used to following directions.
2. Help the class get better acquainted.

Format:

1. Circles were tacked to the bulletin board, the side that faced the bulletin board had writing on it. Nobody could see what the writing said.
2. Each day we turned over one of the circles. We read the writing on the circle (number of people in your family, favorite class, color of your eyes, etc.)
3. Each member of the class added a petal that answered the question. So the product was a daisy.

Station 1 (Teacher Assigned)

Objectives:

1. Children will learn to follow directions without teacher help.
2. Practice in using a phone book, exploring how it is put together, using a phonebook when calling a friend.
3. Practical application of alphabetical order.

Format:

1. Three index cards contained 7 questions each about the phonebook.
2. Each child selected a card and answered the questions on a separate sheet of paper.
3. Example questions:
   a. What is the telephone number of the fire department?
   b. Name three places you could go to if you were planning on buying a bike.
   c. Write the telephone number of five people in this class.

Station 2 (Daily Sign-Up)

Objectives:

1. Use of imagination to create a new country.
2. A chance for people working at the center to communicate with each other.
3. Use the newly created country as a basis for a creative writing.

Format:

1. Paper lollipops are put on the bulletin board.
2. Next to each lollipop is a label
   a. Lollipop cars
   b. Lollipop food
   c. Lollipop schools
   d. Lollipop houses, etc.
3. Children many use scrap material, magic markers, and paper to build Lollipop Land.

Station 3 (Weekly Sign-Up)

Objectives:

1. Awareness of Fall through touch and smell, as well as sight.
2. Experiment with different media: leaves, paint, water color.

Format:

1. Children were asked to gather objects from their home that reminded them of Fall. They were to bring these to school for a display.
2. Activities were displayed on paper leaves made in Fall colors.
   a. Screen and paint prints.
   b. Mount and identify leaves collected at home.
   c. In I.M.C. find out why leaves change color.
   d. Make a book that shows how leaves change through the year.
   e. Trace a leaf, then paint it.
   f. Find out what Indian Summer is, make a tape about it.

Station 4 (Partner Sign-Up)

Objectives:

1. Awareness of the types of transportation we use everyday.
2. Consideration of transportation methods we never use.
3. Predict what future transportation is like.

Station 4 (continued)

Format:

1. Eight pictures showing types of transportation were displayed on the board.
2. Each picture contained 2 or 3 ideas for activities.
3. Options included were:
   a. Cartoons
   b. Stories
   c. Mapping
   d. Building with tinker toys
   e. Clay
   f. Building an airport

Station 5 -Block Center (Free Center)

Objectives:

1. Give the children a chance to manipulate.
2. Creativity through building.
3. Perception check.

Format:

1. Options were listed on the covers of boxes that housed the materials.
2. Copy a pattern from a book (Playschool designs)
3. Create your own designs by using different shapes.
4. Use odd shapes to form one larger shape (i.e. a square)
5. Puzzle-following the pattern put all the shapes into a box.

Station 6-16 mm movie, poetry, filmstrip, and descriptions (Group Center)

Objectives:

1. Children will have an opportunity to work cooperatively in a small group.
2. Exploration of a media never used before (16 mm film)
3. Encourage members of the group to get to know one another better.

Format:

1. There are 4 stations, each group may spend three days at a station.
2. 4 stations were:
   a. 16 mm film
   b. Make your own filmstrip based on an already existing story or make up your own.
   c. Select a picture. List descriptive words, build a strong paragraph using these words.
   d. Pick a subject, i.e. winter, find poems on this topic, copy and illustrate, display on bulletin board.